

Coup.

Programmers tuning in on radio for children

By Josh Grossberg
Staff Writer

Bill Barnett has a motto: "When a child is happy, it's music to a parent's ear."

Barnett should know. He is the president of Aahs Radio, the country's only radio network aimed at children. Although it has only been in existence since October, the network already has 10 affiliates, including KPLS-AM (830) radio in Los Angeles, which hit the airwaves Feb. 11.

"We're way past our expectations," said Barnett. "We are at the point where we thought we'd be in a year."

In fact, the kid biz is one of the fastest growing segments of the entertainment industry, a fact Barnett attributes to members of the baby boom generation growing up and having babies of their own.

"I definitely feel that the time is right," he said. "Parents are more involved in what their kids are doing."

Jim Villanueva agrees. Villanueva is the co-owner and president of KPLS.

"The timing is ideal," he said. "I think there is a whole re-orientation toward kids. That, along with the fact that there is a rising concern about family values. People are paying more attention to their kids. There was an enormous audience being overlooked."

The primary audience for Aahs Radio is children 4 to 12, although both Barnett and Villanueva have 2-year-olds who enjoy listening.

There is, however, another group that listens as much as children.

"In Los Angeles, where most people are listening in their cars, the parents are listening too," said Villanueva. "At least I hope there are parents in the car."



Bill Barnett, of Aahs Radio, left, Mary Kate and Ashley Olsen of ABC's "Full House" and Jim Villanueva, KPLS-AM. The girls have a single "Brother for Sale" that is played on the station.

"When parents get in the car," he continued, "they popped in a Disney soundtrack. They love their kids more than the music they would normally listen to. They want to keep the kids happy and not have them fight with each other in the back seat."

The Aahs Radio format mixes mostly music with games, contests and storytelling. The songs range from children's

tunes to rock 'n' roll oldies. The contests might ask what color the German flag is and other questions that encourage young listeners to use an encyclopedia.

"We teach social responsibility and self-esteem," said Villanueva. "We get an amazing response from kids, parents and educators."

"Our goal," said Barnett, "is to have

a strong presence in the top 100 markets in the country."

The growing popularity of Aahs Radio and the growing number youngsters is creating a need for products that record labels such as Walt Disney Records is more than happy to fill.

"We think it's a good thing that there is so much focus on children's records," said Amy Malsin, spokesperson for Disney Records. "That's a good thing for everyone."

Disney is the world's largest producer of what Malsin calls "family music" and she agrees that aging baby boomers are responsible for its growing popularity.

"These people were devoted to music and rock 'n' roll in particular," she said. "They want to pass along that same feeling and love of music."

Some big name stars are getting into the act. Bob Dylan, Bruce Springsteen, Little Richard and Paula Abdul have all recorded for Disney. They each recorded tracks for the album, "For Our Children," which raised money for pediatric AIDS research. So far, "For Our Children" and its sequel "For Our Children, The Concert" have raised \$3 million.

Over at Kid Rhino, Bobby Goldsboro, former Monkee Mickey Dolenz and longtime kid favorite Hap Palmer have found a home.

Despite the increasing demand for kids' recording, not any song with catchy rhymes will make it onto a record.

"The most important thing is to be innovative, creative and beautifully produced," said Malsin. "It has to appeal to children as well as parents."

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